

## **Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up**

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DCS Communications Office

**May 20, 2005**

### **The Week Ahead**

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**Thurs., May 26** – The Commissioner attends the Foster Care Appreciation at the Nashville City Center, where 12 resource parenting couples from all DCS regions will be honored by the Commissioner and Governor Phil Bredesen.

### **TNKids Notice of Action**

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*Submitted by Mary Beth Franklyn, TennCare Liaison, Blue Ribbon Team*

The Notice of Action in the latest TNKids build was deployed on May 9, 2005. The first case manager to generate a Notice of Action from TNKids was Elizabeth McNeilly, a case manager from Blount County in the East region.

McNeilly has been sent a lime green certificate suitable for framing, with the official seal of approval. And a cash award of \$1.50 for a Coke with lime!

If you have not taken the training, please do so at:

[http://preservice.sworps.utk.edu/tnkidsweb2/custody\\_case\\_workers.html](http://preservice.sworps.utk.edu/tnkidsweb2/custody_case_workers.html)

### **New York Times Highlights Challenges of “Aging Out”**

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A story in the May 19, 2005 edition of the New York Times examines the challenges, issues and dilemmas faced by youth who have aged out of foster care. According to the story, “Each year, some 20,000 youths who were once removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect leave the child welfare system because they get too old for it.”

Registration is required to view the story, which is accessible at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/19/national/19child.html?ex=1117166400&en=cdb56d5639227466&ei=5070>

### **Foster Care Appreciation Picnic a Success**

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*Submitted by Vanessa I. Jones, Personnel Tech 3, Upper Cumberland region*



The Upper Cumberland region held their annual Foster Care Parent Appreciation Picnic on Friday, May 13, 2005 at the Cookeville Civic Center. The event was sponsored in conjunction with Omni Visions and Stroud's Barbeque. Volunteers from all program areas across the region, including juvenile justice, Child Protective Services and court liaisons, as well as administrative, clerical, foster care and specialty staff helped to make the picnic a success for the more than 200 people in attendance.

Regional administrator Sandra Jordan welcomed all in attendance to the picnic and applauded the many foster care parents for the wonderful work they do every for the children. She then began the foster parent giveaway, in which all foster parents competed for one of the six \$100.00 Wal-Mart gift certificates. After the drawing, all foster parents were presented with certificates of appreciation.

For some of the DCS staff, they were able to see children they have worked with for many years and witness how they are currently doing with their new families. There were even some staff members seen kicking up their heels along with the kids and having a great time! Before the night ended, the kids were able to participate in their own grand drawing to add to the "loot" they had already received.

### **Increase in Federal Revenue**

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*Submitted by Commissioner Viola P. Miller*

Steve Hornsby, Deputy Commissioner of Juvenile Justice, is working diligently to help me use the term “absconder” rather than “runaway.”

Remember: Delinquent children aren’t the only ones who run, and any time we do not know the location of a child in our custody, we have a problem.

Whatever we call these youth, they pose a major problem for the Department of Children’s Services.

A few facts:

- We have twice the national annual percentage of absconders from custody.
- We have one of the highest teen commitment rates in the nation.
- More girls than boys abscond.
- Most of these teens run home or back to a familiar area.
- Most of these teens run because they can.
- Most run from our offices immediately after commitment by the courts.

Given these facts, what can we do? After all, children who have absconded create a safety risk for themselves. Some of them create risks for their communities.

Hornsby will be providing data and information to the regions regarding absconders. Please review this through your continuous quality improvement (CQI) process. Decide how to address the issue in your regions, and let Hornsby or me know how we can help.

Thank you for your attention to this most important matter.

## **The May Release of TNKids Is Here – Alive and Well**

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*Submitted by Jimmy Lichtenstein, Director, Systems Development and Enhancements*

The May release of TNKids was delivered to production over the weekend of May 6, 2005. Office of Information Systems (OIS) staff worked through the night Friday and on Saturday to make the new functionality available and ready to use on Monday morning, May 9. Multiple enhancements were made providing new functionality that allows DCS staff to capture more detailed client information which can be used to help better identify needed services and provide more accurate management reporting on our clients.

Changes were also made to existing system functionality that was requested by field to make TNKids an easier tool to use.

The first two weeks of field use has only identified a handful of errors, which have either been corrected or are being worked on. This is proof positive that the effort made by the significant number of field staff that participated in the user acceptance testing process was a beneficial and valuable effort.

Stay tuned for information on the 09/05 and 01/06 TNKids releases with actual delivery dates to be determined.

New changes, implemented in the May release, include:

**Case Recordings** – These will now print in the order you have chosen. In addition, “Family” will be added to the list of person(s) contacted. You will no longer have to choose “Others ” when recording a family member as a contact. Also, if you add a person, it will “stick” in that drop down list for a period of one year or until the case is closed, whichever comes first.

**Addresses** – Case managers will be able to disconnect an incorrect address from a case and then select or enter the correct address. Also, TNKids will now capture the “removal address” for a custody client.

**Data Correction** – How many times do you see multiple records for the same child? The new TNKids will provide a means to associate duplicate cases to a single “master” case. If you see any of these cases on your person searches, contact your field system administrator right away to start this process.

**Alerts** – Alerts Manager will allow employees to create and save custom sorts and filters in the Alerts Manager window.

**Mass Case Assignment** – Team leaders will love this new feature, which will allow you to re-assign cases all at once instead of one-by-one.

**Notice of Action** – TNKids will automatically generate the Notice of Action form and e-mail notification to TennCare advocates regarding the NOA.

**Well-Being Services** – A new icon will be available for FSS Funding Units to use to record any funded purchase.

**IV-E Language** – Child welfare benefits counselors will be able to record whether or not a court order contains the required language for Title IV-E funding eligibility.

## **Policy Development Initiative**

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*Submitted by Petrina Jones-Jesz, Director, Research and Development*

The Research and Development Division strives to provide the department with reporting and analysis of data, the coordination and monitoring of federal and state mandated plans and reports, as well as policy development and coordination. As part of the many projects and initiatives currently taking place in the division, the policy development unit is currently undertaking a major policy rewrite and redesign initiative. This project includes:

- **A reorganization of the existing DCS policy chapters.** The major policy chapters will ultimately be reduced from 33 to 10 chapters with subchapters under the major policy chapters.
- **Updating and revising policies.** The department's policies must reflect the principles identified in the Practice Model and the Brian A. Settlement Agreement. DCS policies must also be revised to appropriately reflect current practice.
- **Identifying gaps in DCS policy.** Critical decision-making points are being identified in various department areas to facilitate the development of needed policies.
- **Reviewing policies to determine compliance with the COA standards.**

Forms attached to these policies will also be reviewed and revised as needed.

The policy development initiative also includes improvements in the dissemination and usefulness of policy to the entire department. A goal is to apply a global search engine to the DCS Intranet policy site. Moreover, the addition of Internet resource links to the policy documents is being considered to provide additional information that will enhance the department's policies.

Policy development and maintenance is an essential part of a productive organization. Our goal is to work directly with program and administrative staff to develop and revise policies that will support the agency's goals and the work being done by all DCS employees.

## **Juvenile Justice Team Excellence**

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*Submitted by Leann Hayes, Case Manager 4/Team Leader, Juvenile Justice*

The Juvenile Justice Team Excellence held its first meeting on Wednesday, May 11, 2005. The team is comprised of representatives from the 12 DCS regions, the five DCS youth development centers, and two representatives from the DCS group homes. Central Office staff was also present to support the team.

The Juvenile Justice Team Excellence convened at the request of Deputy Commissioner Steve Hornsby for the purpose of developing and assisting in the implementation of a comprehensive plan to create a high functioning and effective juvenile justice division.

Hornsby informed the team, “Goal one is to create the number one juvenile justice program in the United States of America.”

Brainstorming and discussion were the focus of much of the day. Issues currently of concern to juvenile justice case managers in the regions and in DCS facilities included high and sometimes inequitable caseloads, a lack of residential programs to treat juvenile justice youth who don't require the security of a youth development center but who are not appropriate for a family foster home, communication problems between the regions and DCS facility staff, the need for additional intensive probation and aftercare programs, effective electronic monitoring, placement of juvenile justice too far from home, the need for each region to have a juvenile justice point person, additional training that addresses specific juvenile justice themes, high turnover, low morale and more.

Every issue, need or concern expressed was documented and placed into one of six Domains, which are Leadership and Management, Work Force Development, Child and Family Centered Practice, Caseload Management, Resource Development and Continuous Quality Improvement/Data Management. Team Excellence members were divided into small workgroups, each being assigned a specific domain. The workgroups were charged with developing strategies and action steps to address the issues in their respective domain.

The first workgroup meeting is scheduled for May 20, 2005. Other workgroups are scheduled to meet the following week.

Field staff members participating on Juvenile Justice Team Excellence are:

- **David Reeves** – Knox County region
- **James Coop** – South Central region
- **Jackie Reece** – Taft Youth Development Center
- **Philip Ellis** – Taft Youth Development Center
- **Eric Ross** – Northeast region
- **Loretta Bradford** – Nashville Transition Center
- **Ginger Farmer** – Bradley County Group Home
- **Steve Collier** – Mt. View Youth Development Center
- **Tracy Haney** – Woodland Hills Youth Development Center
- **Mabel Greenlief** – East Tennessee region
- **Angela Smith** – Upper Cumberland region
- **Nancy Willis** – Davidson County region
- **Margretta Knowles** – New Visions Youth Development Center
- **Crystal Guess** – Mid-Cumberland region
- **Julia Johnson** – Southwest region
- **John Martin** – Northwest region
- **John Swafford** – Taft Youth Development Center
- **LeAnn Hayes** – Southeast region
- **Wilma Wiley** – Hamilton County region
- **Marvin Chaney** – Shelby County region

- **Keith Waldron** – Wilder Youth Development Center

If you have juvenile justice concerns or issues, please feel free to contact any of the Team Excellence members.

## **Family Reunification: A Must in Child Welfare Services**

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*Submitted by Mattie Satterfield, Director of Reunification Services*

***“One hundred years from now, it won’t matter what kind of car I drove or how much money was in the bank account, but what will matter is the difference I made in the life of a child. – Author unknown***

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), clearly requires child welfare agencies to move child to permanency quickly. Additionally, it states “reunification” as one of the goals to ensure that children do not languish in out of home care. Reunification should be the preferred option for each child entering out-of-home care, when it can safely occur for each child.

The separation of a child from his or her parents as a safety intervention must be balanced against the trauma of removal, prolonged separation from the family with whom the child shares family membership, tradition and identity. A child’s attachment to his or her family, even in the face of maltreatment, must be understood as an essential component of the child’s emotional security. Best practice intervention is to strengthen the family through frequent parent-child contact, via visitation and phone calls, and any other opportunity for meaningful parent-child involvement while the child is in out-of-home care.

Reunification is the planned process of reconnecting children who are in out of home care with their families and their communities, while recognizing the unique demands and needs created by the child’s sense of time. Each child deserves to receive timely quality services to reunite with their family members as quickly as possible to a safe and nurturing home environment.

A few basic principles of family reunification include:

- The child’s health and safety is always paramount.
- The child’s sense of time must always be considered.
- Family reunification is a dynamic process, based on the child’s and family’s changing needs.
- The goal of family reunification services is to reunify families in a timely manner and, while children are in out of home care, to provide for their well-being and strengthen their connection to their family.
- Continual assessing of the family for reunification and move toward achievement of that goal whenever risk levels are acceptable and no safety concerns exist.

In order to move forward with reunification services, there must be a basic belief that most families can care for their children if appropriately assisted. In addition, there must be an attitude that welcomes the involvement of any and all members of the child's family when the child's safety can be assured. Of course, family is defined as any person or persons that the child and family have an established relationship or consider "family."

Family reunification practice is guided by an approach that emphasizes the importance of improving the interaction between people and their community, promoting family empowerment, and engaging in advocacy and social actions that enhance family functioning. Taking this approach builds on strengthens and potential of parents and other family members.

### **Core Leadership**

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Minutes from the May 17, 2005 Core Leadership meeting will be available in next week's Weekly Wrap Up.